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Seventh United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names

Report of the Secretary-General

1. The Seventh United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names, convened in accordance with Economic and Social Council decision 1997/213, was held at United Nations Headquarters from 13 to 22 January 1997.

2. The Conference was attended by 211 representatives and observers from 71 countries,[1] five specialized agencies,[2] one intergovernmental organization,[3] two international scientific organizations,[4] three other organizations,[5] and two units of the United Nations Secretariat.[6]

3. The agenda for the Conference was prepared by the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names at its eighteenth session (Geneva, August 1996). The Conference considered the reports of linguistic/geographical divisions and of Governments on the situation in their regions and countries and on the progress made in the standardization of geographical names since the Sixth Conference. It established three committees, on national, technical and international programmes and exchanges, respectively, to consider national standardization – including field collection and office treatment of names, treatment of names in multilingual areas, the administrative structure of national names authorities and toponymic guidelines for map editors and other editors – and items related to the creation of toponymic data files, terminology, the naming of features beyond a single sovereignty, romanization systems, and toponymic education and practice. In addition, the Conference reviewed cooperation with national and international agencies and bodies and the benefits of information obtainable from the increasing number of toponymic Web sites. It also considered lists of country names, one of which provides the names in the six official languages of the United Nations and in the official local romanized form.

4. The proceedings of the Conference are to be published in two volumes – volume I containing the report of the Conference and the resolutions adopted,[7] and volume II, the technical papers submitted to the Conference.

5. The Conference adopted 14 resolutions and a vote of thanks. The resolutions reflected both the concerns on issues of a general nature expressed in plenary sessions and those related to specific matters debated in the three committees of the Conference.

6. The Conference recognized and acknowledged with appreciation the work performed by the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNGEGN). As

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a result of a proposal from the Group of Experts, approved at its nineteenth session, the Conference recommended that a new, French-speaking division of the Group be established (resolution 1). Reflecting on the work of committee I on national programmes, the Conference recommended that measures be taken nationally to implement its guidelines on the collection and office treatment of geographical names and that, whenever possible, national standardization be based on the current local usage of name forms collected through field work (resolution 5). With regard to the list of country names presented by the Working Group on a List of Country Names, the Conference recommended that the UNGEGN list of country names, in their official language(s) and in their romanized form as well as in the three working languages of the Group of Experts, be updated on a regular basis and regarded as a reference for all cartographic applications published in the Roman alphabet (resolution 8).

7. In dealing with the work of committee II on technical programmes, the Conference, referring to toponymic data exchange formats and standards, recommended that countries promote the international use of nationally standardized names through the publication and exchange of digital toponymic data utilizing international text-encoding standards and a digital gazetteer format based on recommendation E of resolution 4, adopted by the first Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names.[8] It further recommended that the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names liaise with the Unicode Consortium to keep that body informed on toponymic text-encoding requirements and to promote the development of computer tools to facilitate digital exchange of geographical names information (resolution 6). Realizing the full potential of the use of the Internet, the Conference recommended that countries establish toponymic Web sites for appropriate toponymic purposes, with access to Web site data provided free of charge in the interest of international standardization. It further recommended that a Web site for the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names be established and that its Working Group on Toponymy Training Courses consider the development of an Internet-based toponymy training course (resolution 9).

8. The Conference, in reviewing the work of committee III on international programmes and exchanges, recommended to the Arab League that it pursue its efforts to organize a conference to address the problems of implementing the amended Beirut system of 1972 for the romanization of Arabic script and to present, at the earliest opportunity, a solution to the Group of Experts (resolution 4). Recognizing the active and growing involvement of the private sector and consumer enterprises in activities related to cartography and the substantive need for wide dissemination of standardized place names in the global market, the Conference recommended that the Group of Experts pursue the underwriting of cooperative agreements and sponsorships with interested parties in the private sector, along existing or recommended guidelines promulgated by the Secretariat. It further recommended that progress in that area be reported by the Secretariat at future meetings of the Group of Experts (resolution 7). The Conference, reflecting on the need for training in toponymy urged organizers of training courses in toponymy to make available a copy of their teaching materials to the convenor of the Working Group on Training Courses in Toponymy of the Group of Experts, so that it could act as a clearing house (resolution 11). It also encouraged the Working Group on Training Courses in Toponymy to organize short, advanced training courses on the standardization of geographical names and to adjoin those courses to meetings of UNGEGN for the benefit of participating toponymic experts (resolution 12). In addressing the issue of access to and the archiving of technical papers created in connection with conferences on the standardization of geographical names and sessions of UNGEGN, the Conference recommended that the support and assistance of countries be sought to catalogue and index the information in the technical papers, in coordination with the Secretariat, and that assistance and support of a country or countries also be sought to reproduce the documentation in a form accessible to all. It was further recommended that the Secretariat, within available resources, collect and maintain all subsequent materials and papers (resolution 14).

9. The Conference, in acknowledging the responsibility and mandate of the Secretariat in the organization and implementation of regional cartographic conferences, and conscious of the key elements that geographical names and information technology represent in the cartographic field, recommended that the Secretariat inform the ad hoc Working Group on Proposals for the Reorganization of the United Nations Regional Cartographic Conferences of the concerns, deliberations and recommendations of UNGEGN and of the Conferences themselves (resolution 3). Acknowledging a common interest shared by UNGEGN and the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) in several subject areas, the Conference recommended that the Secretariat liaise with ISO in order to share information and coordinate initiatives on relevant issues and investigate the feasibility and desirability of establishing stronger links between ISO and the Group of Experts (resolution 13). The Conference, aware of the restructuring process affecting the United Nations structures dealing with social and economic affairs and noting the continuous decrease in the resources allocated

to secretarial work of the United Nations Group of Experts and the United Nations Conferences on the Standardization of Geographical Names, requested the Secretary-General to ensure the continued availability of officials with the necessary expertise and experience in cartography and/or the standardization of geographical names to provide the relevant support to the Group of Experts and the Conferences (resolution 10).

10. The Conference, noting the positive results of the work performed on the standardization of geographical names at both the national and international levels by States Members of the United Nations, also noting the essential role played by the Seventh Conference and by the Group of Experts at its nineteenth session in the coordination of that work, and recognizing the necessity of continuing it, recommended to the Economic and Social Council that the Eighth Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names be convened in the second half of 2002 and that the twentieth session of the Group of Experts be convened during the fourth quarter of 1999. It further recommended that the Council continue to support the important work of the secretariat of the Group of Experts regarding the standardization of geographical names (resolution 2).

11. A list of the resolutions adopted by the Conference and the proposed provisional agenda for the Eighth Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names are attached as annex I and annex II, respectively. The activities recommended by the Seventh Conference and those required for the preparation of the Eighth Conference and the twentieth session of the Group of Experts, deemed to be of a continuous nature, have been included in the medium-term plan under programme 8, subprogramme 8.2, for the period 1998-2001, and it is anticipated that they will be incorporated into the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2000-2001. Inclusion of these activities is not expected to give rise to additional expenditures. In the proposed programme budget for the biennium 1998-1999, these activities, which are of a continuous nature, fall under section 7a (economic and social affairs). Additional resources need not be sought for these activities in every biennium.

Recommendations to the Council

12. In view of the importance of the work of the Group of Experts on Geographical Names and the Conferences on the Standardization of Geographical Names and the essential contribution they continue to provide to member States in the geographic field and related cartographic areas, it is recommended that the Economic and Social Council:

(a) Endorse the recommendation that the Eighth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names be convened for eight working days in the second half of 2002;

(b) Also endorse the recommendation that the twentieth session of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names be convened during the fourth quarter of 1999;

(c) Request the Secretary-General to take measures, as appropriate, to implement the recommendations of the Seventh United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names, especially with regard to the work of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names.

Notes

[1] Algeria, Argentina, Australia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Belgium, Benin, Botswana, Bulgaria, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Canada, Central African Republic, China, Côte d'Ivoire, Croatia, Cuba, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Egypt, El Salvador, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Haiti, Holy See, Hungary, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Latvia, Lebanon, Mali, Mexico, Monaco, Morocco, Mozambique, Myanmar, Netherlands, Nigeria, Norway, Oman, Peru, Poland, Qatar, Republic of Korea, Romania, Russian Federation, Saudi Arabia, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Syrian Arab Republic, The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Togo, Turkey, Ukraine, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States of America.

[2] United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat), United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), World Bank, International Maritime Organization (IMO).

[3] Pan American Institute of Geography and History (PAIGH).

[4] International Hydrographic Organization (IHO); International Cartographic Association (ICA).

[5] International Organization for Standardization (ISO); National Geographic Society; Agence de cooperation culturelle et technique (ACCT).

[6] Economic Commission for Africa, Department of Public Information.

[7] See *Seventh United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names, New York, 13-22 January 1998* (E/CONF.91/3), vol. I, *Report of the Conference* (to be issued), chap. III.

[8] See *United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names, Geneva, 4-22 September 1967* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.68.I.9), vol. I, *Report of the Conference*, chap. III.

Annex I

List of resolutions adopted by the Seventh Conference

1. Creation of a French-speaking division
2. Eighth Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names and twentieth session of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names
3. Standardization of geographical names and the United Nations regional cartographic conferences
4. Review of the amended Beirut system of 1972 for the romanization of Arabic script
5. National standardization based on local usage
6. Toponymic data exchange formats and standards
7. Cooperation and agreements with consumer enterprises
8. List of country names
9. Standardization of geographical names utilizing the Internet
10. Support
11. Toponymy training course materials
12. Toponymy training courses in conjunction with sessions of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names
13. Liaison with the International Organization for Standardization
14. Access and archiving of technical papers
15. Vote of thanks

Annex II

Provisional agenda for the Eighth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names

1. Opening of the Conference.
2. Election of the President of the Conference.
3. Organizational matters:
   (a) Adoption of the rules of procedure;
   (b) Adoption of the agenda;
   (c) Election of officers other than the President;
   (d) Organization of work;
   (e) Credentials of representatives to the Conference.
4. Reports by Governments on the situation in their countries and on the progress made in the standardization of geographical names since the Seventh Conference.
5. Reports by divisions of the Group of Experts on Geographical Names on the situation in their divisions and on the progress made in the standardization of geographical names since the Seventh Conference.
6. Meetings and conferences:
   (a) United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names;
   (b) Divisional and interdivisional meetings and programmes;
   (c) National names meetings, conferences and symposia;
   (d) International names meetings, conferences and symposia.
7. Measures taken and proposed to implement United Nations resolutions on the standardization of geographical names.
8. Economic and social benefits of the national and international standardization of geographical names.
9. National standardization:
   (a) Field collection of names;
   (b) Office treatment of names;
   (c) Treatment of names in multilingual areas;
   (d) Administrative structure of national names authorities;
   (e) Toponymic guidelines for map editors and other editors.
10. Exonyms.
11. Reports on programmes to assist with pronunciation of names.
12. Toponymic data files:
   (a) Data collection procedures;
   (b) Data elements required;
   (c) Toponymic data transfer standards and formats;

(d) Automated data-processing (ADP) systems;

(e) Compatibility and structure of systems;

(f) National gazetteers;

(g) Other publications.

13. Toponymic Web sites.

14. Terminology in the standardization of geographical names.

15. Features beyond a single sovereignty:

(a) Policies, procedures and cooperative arrangements;

(b) Features common to two or more nations.

16. Writing systems:

(a) Romanization;

(b) Conversion into non-Roman writing systems;

(c) Writing of names in unwritten languages.

17. Toponymic education and practice and international cooperation:

(a) Existing education and practice;

(b) Training courses in toponymy;

(c) Exchange of advice and information;

(d) Exchange of personnel;

(e) Technical assistance;

(f) Cooperation with national organizations;

(g) Cooperation with international organizations;

(h) Cooperation with public information media.

18. Country names.

19. Arrangements for the Ninth Conference.

20. Adoption of the report of the Conference.

21. Adoption of resolutions drafted during the Conference.

22. Closing of the Conference.